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AUTHOR LaSalle, Linda A.
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ABSTRACT

Previous research has highlighted some of the problems faced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students. This study examined attitudes of faculty, staff, and students regarding lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues at a large public research university. Of the 1,952 faculty and staff who returned a survey on issues related to sexual orientation, 564 offered written comments while 262 of 671 students provided responses. Comments were classified in the following manner: Advocating (expressing support for lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights); Accepting; Neutral, Oppositional, and Hostile. The greatest percentage of comments fell into the oppositional category. More faculty than students expressed an advocating opinion and a fairly substantial percentage of students were accepting. Together the two categories, advocating and accepting, accounted for 29% of the total comments. There was a relatively small number of hostile comments. Comments in the oppositional category were analyzed and four themes emerged for both faculty/staff and student comments. The first theme was related to an individual's religious or moral beliefs. The second set of responses indicated a belief that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people were behaviorally and psychologically abnormal. The third theme reflected the notion that sexual orientation is a private matter and should be kept behind closed doors. The final theme reflected an opinion of being "fed up" or "tired" of the whole issue. University administrators and educators should take responsibility for educating their communities about homophobia and heterosexism, the manifestations of these concepts, and the harm that they create in the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. (ABL)

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EXPLORING CAMPUS INTOLERANCE: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS CONCERNING LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE[1]

Linda A. La Salle

Center for the Study of Higher Education

The Pennsylvania State University

Paper presented at the meeting of the

American Educational Research Association

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INTRODUCTION

> "All gay, lesbian and bisexual people should be taken out and shot in the head. They are going to hell anyway. I would not think twice about making an anti-lesbian or anti-gay remark."
>
> "I personally have no objections to PRIVATE homosexual activity. I believe that homosexuality is deviant behavior and should not be publicly condoned."
>
> "The Bible does not make excuses. It has given us a wonderful solution. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals should not be harassed. Neither should they be made so comfortable that they get misguided perceptions that they are normal."

The above comments were taken from a campus-wide survey of students, faculty, and staff at "Normal State University." The remarks express varying degrees of opposition toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. The first comment -- about shooting gays and lesbians -- depicts a violent and hateful attitude. The second comment, that calls for individuals to be private about their sexual lives, views lesbian, gay, and bisexual behavior as deviant, but acceptable as long as it remains closeted. And the third comment, based on religious morals, expresses the perspective that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people should not be granted the same social privileges as heterosexuals, but also recognizes that harassment and abuse are inappropriate. While all three comments depict oppositional attitudes, they also express a variety of values and beliefs.

The purpose of this paper is to examine oppositional beliefs toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. I highlight some of the justifications or perceptions that individuals have about sexual orientation. I point out that in a university setting, as in the larger national context, these attitudes serve to limit the experiences of individuals whose interests and realities do not conform to prescribed cultural tenets. Furthermore, I claim that the expression of negative feelings toward lesbian, gay and bisexual people causes psychological and social stress. I argue that if institutional leaders are aware of the

negative attitudes expressed toward non-heterosexual people, and if they are aware that these attitudes legitimize the oppression of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, then they must act accordingly to create a climate where all individuals are free from harassment and discrimination.

Before presenting the findings, I examine research on attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, as well as highlight previous assessments of campus climates in relation to issues of sexual orientation. After the review of the relevant literature, I provide a discussion on the methodology employed in collecting and analyzing the data. I follow the methodological explanation with a presentation of the findings. Finally, I conclude by providing an analysis of the results and an explanation of how oppositional comments are linked to homophobia and heterosexism and how these comments serve to delegitimize the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sexual/affectional orientation is a topic that has not received much attention in the literature until recent years. This is especially true when the research on psychological deviance is disregarded. Recently however, more studies are being conducted, and for the purposes of this paper I examine literature that falls into two categories. The first considers general attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and the second entails the assessment of campus climates through university sponsored reports, studies, and/or surveys. In this section I highlight various studies on attitudinal measures related to issues of sexual orientation. Then I explore research that has examined the nature and degree of problems faced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual people on university campuses.

Attitudes

A number of researchers have studied the attitudinal dimensions of negativism toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people along a cognitive, behavioral, and affective continuum. For example, Aguero, Bloch, and Byrne (1984) reported that subjects with the greatest dislike for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people "responded with negative affect and believed that homosexuality was a learned problem" (p. 95). Herek (1984) noted that a general "condemnation-toleration" factor accounts for the greatest amount of variance in attitude statements, while a "belief" factor accounts for a very small percentage of variance. Using factor analysis Millham, San Miguel, and Kellogg (1976) identified six factors to conceptualize the attitudes of heterosexual subjects toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. These factors included repressive-dangerous, personal anxiety, moral reprobation, and cross-sexed mannerism attitudes.

Additionally, VanderStoep and Green (1988) and Maret (1984) studied church affiliated colleges noting conservatism and fundamentalism to be the best indicators of negative attitudes toward lesbian and gay people. Grieger and Ponterotto (1988), who examined students' knowledge of AIDS and attitudes toward lesbian and gay people, reported that in general students with a gay or lesbian personal acquaintance expressed more tolerant attitudes toward lesbian and gay people.

Campus Climate

Studies related to campus climate for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people focus on a variety of issues, and in general paint a bleak outlook for their social and educational experiences. D'Augelli (1988, 1989) highlighted a high rate of anti-lesbian and anti-gay verbal abuse as well as a small, but substantial, percentage of threats of physical violence and personal property damage reported by lesbian and gay students, faculty, and staff.

Reynolds and Wilson (1985) reported that gay men rated the overall climate at the University of Virginia lower than straight men, and specifically, gay males rated the climate lower on dimensions of emotional support, intellectualism, change, and innovation.

Additionally, several universities have reported investigations of their own campus climates (University of California at Santa Cruz, 1990; Rutgers University, 1989; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1987; and University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1985). These reports revealed that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students were "significantly more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to have experienced problems associated with harassment, discrimination, and loneliness" (Executive Summary, University of California at Los Angeles, 1989). The University of Oregon (1990) further reported that "the University environment is neither consistently safe for, nor tolerant of, nor academically inclusive of lesbians, gay men, or bisexuals" (p. 5).

The previous research highlights some of the problems faced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. We cite this research as evidence of the hostile environment experienced by some members of college and university communities; An environment that is not atypical of the larger national context. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (1984) documented that over 90% of the individuals that they surveyed had experienced some form of harassment as a result of their sexual/affectional orientation. Furthermore, scholars have also linked the violence and hostility experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual people to the rate of suicide in this population (Saunders and Valente, 1987). Gibson (1989) reports that "gay youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than other young people" (p. 110) because of "the shame of ridicule and fear of attack" (p. 112) they experience. This literature is evidence of the alienation of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people that is created when heterosexuals engage in name calling, death threats,

and violence. This literature is important because not only does it indicate the existence of a different educational and work environment, but it also shows that additional social and psychological stress is created for individuals that are victimized and harassed.

METHOD

The comments analyzed for this paper were collected in conjunction with a 38-item survey instrument created to examine the attitudes of faculty, staff, and students regarding lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues at Normal State University. The institution is a large public research university located in the northeast with a student body of approximately 38,000. The university is nestled within a fairly conservative community where, prior to the survey, issues of sexual orientation were relatively invisible and openly lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals were often plagued by harassment and discrimination. The survey was developed by a newly formed committee for lesbian and gay concerns to assess the campus climate during a time when the university received pressure from a variety of lesbian, gay, and bisexual interest groups to include a sexual orientation clause in its non-discrimination policy.

During the spring of 1991, 4,500 surveys were distributed to a random sample of faculty and staff; 3,000 surveys were distributed to a random sample of undergraduate students. The survey was conducted with complete anonymity and respondents were never identified by name. The final portion of the survey was an optional, open-ended question asking the respondent to comment on issues related to sexual orientation at Normal State University. Of the 1,952 faculty and staff who returned the survey, 564 offered written comments while 262 of the 671 students provided responses. The analysis in this paper is focused solely upon the written comments.

The methodology involved inductive analysis and was conducted by myself and another research assistant. Patton (1980) described the process as one where "the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (p. 306). In other words, instead of evaluating the comments with preconceived notions about the types of categories that might apply, we instead allowed the categories to emerge from the written responses based upon similarities and differences. We believe that the analysis of textual data, in this case written responses to an open ended question, facilitates our understanding of the values and beliefs of individuals. Written responses are advantageous because they allow for unstructured comments by the respondent, free of the prescribed categorization inherent in the design of multiple choice questionnaires.

The first step in our analysis involved an initial reading of the comments to develop a general sense of their content. In this reading we noted that many of the remarks ranged from a high degree of support for lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues to a high degree of disapproval. We also identified a substantial number of neutral remarks and/or confused responses that seemed to fall in the middle. We began to see the formation of a continuum and our next step was to develop categories between the middle or neutral category and the extremes. Based upon the nature of the remarks, it become obvious that two more categories were needed to sufficiently capture the essence of the remaining comments; one related to an accepting attitude and another related to resistance of lesbian, gay, and bisexual existence. Thus, a continuum of five inductively derived categories emerged: advocating, accepting, neutral (unclear), oppositional, and hostile.

We then individually re-read the comments and placed them into one of the five categories. Where our classifications coincided, the comment was considered appropriate

for that category. Where differences occurred, the comments were discussed and consensus was reached regarding the most appropriate category. Additionally, some comments reflected two themes. For example, some respondents expressed support for lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights, but opposed the "lifestyle"[2] based upon religious convictions. In these cases, we categorized the comment based upon the strongest, most overriding theme. Strength of theme was generally determined by the nature of the words used as well as the length of the comments reflecting each theme.

Comments were classified in the following manner:

- **Advocating** if the individual stated that they supported lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights and/or lifestyle. These individuals were clear about the need to treat lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as equal citizens.

- **Accepting** comments indicated that the respondent was in favor of lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights and/or lifestyle, but stopped short of advocating for their cause.

- **Neutral** comments included two types of responses: those that were confusing or unclear and those that were peripheral, such as those addressing strengths or weakness of the survey.

- **Oppositional** comments were those that expressed non-support for lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues. These individuals stated that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people should not have equal rights, and/or rejected the lifestyle based upon behavioral, moral or psychological grounds.

- **Hostile** comments expressed a degree of hatred, anger, or violence toward

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[2] It should be noted that I do not perceive one's sexual orientation as a "lifestyle," but instead as an existence. However, I have chosen to use this term because many of the respondents used it and it more accurately conveys the meaning of their comments.

lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

Examples of comments that fit into each of the classifications are provided below:

Advocating

"If any community within our society should encourage acceptance of diverse views/practices, the University is that community. I feel an anti-discrimination statement is appropriate and that those who wish should be allowed a forum to educate and discuss sexual orientation at [Normal State University]."

Accepting

"I think that whatever gender a person is attracted to is their choice -- not society; if one prefers the same sex -- then so be it -- let them be happy. Just because they don't conform to the world's ideas and standards [doesn't] mean they are any less of a human being."

"I feel that people should be more tolerant and accepting of one another. I am heterosexual but I will not judge anyone who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. That is their choice as is heterosexuality for myself. I might not completely understand homosexuality but I won't judge or discriminate."

Neutral/Unclear

"The questionnaire is not clear."

"I have not encountered any controversy concerning homosexuality at [Normal State University]."

"I haven't been exposed to enough of this issue to make any real comment."

Oppositional

"This subject is a waste of time for university people. If people act differently, they should expect to be treated differently."

"Gay, lesbian and bi-sexual lifestyles are immoral and should not be accepted as an ok lifestyle. I don't want my children to grow up thinking because everyone's doing it, it is alright. The Bible calls it sin!"

"Homosexuals should not force their beliefs onto me and should stop trying to justify their inane actions."

"Males and females were created differently for a purpose. Homosexuality just goes against everything I learned to be correct."

Hostile

"I feel too many resources are being devoted to minority groups. If you can't fit in, get the hell out."

"I'm fed up with kow-towing to sexual perverts! It's enough to have to coexist with people who are tearing down the traditional family structure. Don't cram them down my throat. If we extend special privileges to them, why not do the same for child molesters, etc.? They're perverts too!"

"It is obvious that homosexuals are genetically inferior to heterosexuals, and therefore should be eliminated, before they contaminate the rest of the 'STRAIGHT' world. If I were in a position of power I would implement this program to its fullest extent, to make the world a better place to live."

RESULTS

We tabulated the responses of the five categories with the following results:

TABLE 1 - BREAKDOWN OF COMMENTS BY FACULTY AND STAFF

Advocating	Accepting	Neutral	Oppositional	Hostile
92	64	117	281	10
16%	11%	21%	50%	2%

TABLE 2 - BREAKDOWN OF COMMENTS BY STUDENTS

Advocating	Accepting	Neutral	Oppositional	Hostile
18	65	28	130	21
7%	25%	11%	49%	8%

The tables indicate that the greatest percentage of comments fall into the oppositional category -- 50% of all comments. It is interesting to note that more faculty than students express an advocating opinion and that a fairly substantial percentage of student comments are accepting. Together these two categories, advocating and accepting, account for 29% of the total comments. There is a relatively small number of hostile

comments (4%), the importance of which will be discussed later in this paper.

Given the predominate number of comments in the oppositional and hostile categories and their relationship to intolerance, we further explored the nature of those responses. After re-reading the comments in the hostile category we concluded that it was not necessary to delineate those responses -- the comments were similar to one another in their expression of a high degree of intolerance and animosity (often violent in nature) toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

Comments in the oppositional category were analyzed using the methodology previously described and four differing themes emerged for both the faculty and staff, and student comments. The first theme related to an individual's religious or moral beliefs. The second set of responses indicated a belief that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are behaviorally and psychologically abnormal. The third theme reflected the notion that sexual orientation is a "private matter," not a public issue, and should be kept behind closed doors. The final theme reflected an opinion of being "fed up" or "tired" of the whole issue. These individuals stated that the survey and attempts by the University to address issues of sexual diversity were a waste of time and resources.

Examples of comments that fit these categories are:

<u>It's Immoral</u>

> "My only comment is please read: Romans 1:26-32; I Timothy 1:1-10; I Corinthians 6:9-10; Jude 1:1-10."
>
> "The Bible does not make excuses. It has given us a wonderful solution. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals should not be harassed. Neither should they be made so comfortable that they get misguided perceptions that they are normal."
>
> "Gay, lesbian or bisexual relationships are immoral and wrong! Their types of relationships go against nature and how God created us."

<u>They're Abnormal</u>

"Gay and lesbian individuals are ill persons. I have no respect for them at all!"

"I believe the best way to help homosexual people is to provide them with the opportunity for psychoanalysis."

"These issues are completely out of hand. To say that the gay life is just an alternative lifestyle is just not true. There is nothing NORMAL about it."

Keep It Private

"I believe that I worked with a gay fellow, he never discussed the subject. I do not discuss my own sexual habits, I DO NOT feel the work place is the place where sex should be even brought up. If a married couple (man and woman) openly displayed affection at work, this would upset me also. [Normal State University] is paying me to work for 8 hours, NOT make love. LEAVE THIS SUBJECT ALONE."

"I've never asked anyone their sexual preference. Why the big deal to say it's ok to come out of the closet and be proud of one's homosexuality. Why the pressure to advertise one's preferences? I honestly feel that whatever two consenting adults choose to do IN PRIVATE is up to them, but why the grand crusade to make it all so public?"

It's A Waste Of Time

"I feel this is a waste of time and paper. There are other minorities...that are discriminated against to a greater degree than gays or bisexuals. What about the mentally or physically handicapped and elderly?"

"I believe the University administration is making too much of an issue about this whole matter. But it makes for employment for people to write surveys. Now, let's get on with REAL problems at [Normal State University]. I've been here 24 years and this isn't anything new."

It should be noted that some of the comments expressed more than one theme, but for the purposes of categorization comments were grouped according to the most salient theme. Salience of theme was determined by the nature of the words used as well as the length of the comments reflecting each theme.

Tables 3 and 4 show the breakdown of the oppositional category by theme.

TABLE 3 - OPPOSITIONAL COMMENTS BY FACULTY AND STAFF

It's Immoral	They're Abnormal	Keep It Private	It's A Waste Of Time
56	65	53	107
20%	23%	19%	38%

TABLE 4 - OPPOSITIONAL COMMENTS BY STUDENTS

It's Immoral	They're Abnormal	Keep It Private	It's A Waste Of Time
16	27	35	52
12%	21%	27%	49%

These figures indicate that the majority of oppositional comments reflect an opinion that issues surrounding sexual orientation are a waste of time. In fact, 39% of the oppositional comments fall into this category. The "Keep It Private" and "They're Abnormal" themes respectively represent 21% and 22% of the total. The immorality theme represents the smallest percentage of all oppositional comments (18%).

DISCUSSION

In this section I show how the hostile and oppositional comments are expressions of homophobia and heterosexism. I define these concepts, describe the form they take, and then provide examples from the study. I show that the hostile comments are examples of homophobia and the oppositional comments are examples of heterosexism. In doing so I argue that discrimination against lesbian, gay, and bisexual people is rooted in a variety of rationales and that those attitudes are explicitly linked to homophobia and heterosexism. It is important to understand these concepts and their manifestations for three reasons: 1) they explain the systematic discrimination and oppression of lesbian,

gay, and bisexual people; 2) they contribute negatively to the self-esteem, personal, and intellectual growth of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people; and 3) the persistence of these conditions prevent institutions of higher education from achieving the goals of appreciating difference.

There is no doubt that homophobia and heterosexism are confusing concepts. Their meaning and use have received much attention both within the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community and the general population. For the purposes of this paper and for the sake of clarity I define them in the following manner: homophobia is the display of fear, anger, and hatred concerning the affectional and physical expression of feelings toward members of the same sex; heterosexism is the "belief in the inherent superiority of one form of loving over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (Lorde, 1985, p. 3). Together these two concepts establish that heterosexuals are the norm and the standard and that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are the deviants and the marginal. Embedded in these concepts are myths which serve to define lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as unworthy of the same societal protections and privileges that are given to those who abide by the cultural norm of heterosexuality.

I focus upon homophobia first. In the previous paragraph I defined homophobia as fear, anger, and hatred. This definition implies intense negative feelings about lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. These emotions manifest themselves in name calling, threats of violence, and, even more dangerously, actual physical abuse. In other words, people express homophobia through overt, deliberate, and harmful language and behavior. In this study, hostile respondents indicated that all lesbian, gay, and bisexual people should be "injected with the AIDS virus," "taken out and shot in the head," "quarantined," and "put to death." Furthermore, some respondents explicitly stated that they hate lesbian, gay,

and bisexual people and have no reservations about inflicting violence upon them.

One might be tempted to argue that the relatively small number of hostile, and therefore homophobic, comments found in this study is inconsequential, but the fact of the matter is that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people at Normal State live with the fear that 4% of the people (1 out of 25) may want to cause them physical harm or even kill them simply because of their sexual/affectional orientation. Furthermore, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people have to guard their language, behavior, and dress to avoid possible confrontations with homophobic individuals. I am arguing that this hostile behavior and its permissibility is something that no human being should have to live with or design her or his life around.

Now, I focus upon heterosexism, an equally damaging form of discrimination, but far more subtle in its manifestation. Embedded in the concept of heterosexism is the notion - often an unconscious notion - that being heterosexual, and thus having the culturally defined superior sexual orientation, entitles one to a variety of privileges and opportunities that are denied non-heterosexual people. It is heterosexism that allows lesbian, gay, and bisexual people to be barred or fired from jobs, harassed at work, discharged from the military, denied housing, and prohibited from immigrating to this country (Goodman, Lakey, Lashof, & Thorne, 1983). It is heterosexism that denies lesbian and gay people the same benefits from health care, life insurance, tuition waivers, and leave policies that heterosexual married couples receive, and increasingly, non-married heterosexual couples. Even more disheartening, it is heterosexism that allows the courts to deny parental and visitation rights to lesbian and gay parents in addition to prohibiting adoption privileges to lesbian and gay couples.

The four oppositional themes (It's Immoral, They're Abnormal, Keep It Private, and

It's A Waste Of Time) identified in this study are examples of heterosexism. Together these themes help establish the norm of heterosexuality thereby sanctioning institutional bias against lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Individually they represent the different rationales upon which people rely, either consciously or unconsciously, to justify the oppression of non-heterosexual people. Now, I look at the four themes separately.

The "It's Immoral" theme relies upon religious doctrine to establish the superiority of heterosexuality. In this study respondents cited Biblical passages, claimed that "God made two sexes for one reason," and stated that "homosexual freedom is sinful." These individuals use the powerful cultural ideology of religion to construct the inferiority of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and in so doing contribute to the cultural norm of heterosexuality that allows for discrimination against lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

The "They're Abnormal" theme relies upon the principles of psychology and behavior. Respondents stated that "being a lesbian/gay is a disease," "it is not natural and therefore wrong" and any lesbian, gay, or bisexual person "is definitely chemically, biologically, and psychologically impaired." Many individuals in this category went so far as to say that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people should not "receive any extra privileges or rights" because of their deviant behavior. These individuals are expressly stating their belief in the superiority of their sexual orientation. Their comments are prime examples of how heterosexism contributes to discrimination because by defining a group or individual as abnormal (relying upon widespread culturally accepted doctrine) a justification is created for denying that group, or individual, rights and privileges.

The "Keep It Private" category reflects a lack of awareness of heterosexism and the discrimination it creates. Many of these individuals said they did not have a problem with lesbian, gay, or bisexual people "as long as they don't need to show it publicly." Inherent

in this comment is the notion that only heterosexuality is valid enough to be a public form of expression. Furthermore, because these comments focus upon the private, individual aspects of sexual orientation, they serve to decontextualize the political struggle for lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights.

The fourth and final category, "It's A Waste Of Time," expresses the view that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and their tribulations are not important enough to warrant further consideration. In fact, many respondents suggested that the University focus its energy toward groups that are more easily identified as oppressed, i.e., racial and ethnic groups, and the physically disabled. This notion is embedded in an unwillingness to accept sexual orientation as a reasonable criterion for discrimination. And, by stating that the University is wasting its money, time, and resources exploring campus climate these individuals are essentially expressing a resistance to legitimizing the presence of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and by doing so they indirectly sanction discrimination and acts of violence.

Recommendations

In making recommendations for addressing homophobia and heterosexism I feel that it is essential for administrators and educators to understand that homophobia and heterosexism are neither monolithic nor stagnant concepts: they take on new and varied meanings as our cultural values change. Accordingly revisions in educational programs must take place to address these ever-changing issues. Given this caveat, I advocate that the following broad, but critical, actions be taken toward establishing a campus climate of acceptance for and recognition of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

First, I suggest that all institutions include sexual orientation as a protected category in their non-discrimination policies. The absence of formal policies and public

statements prohibiting both the overt forms of homophobia and the subtle discriminatory actions of heterosexism legitimizes and condones the hatred and fear of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Such statements are important because they foster diversity, and provide the opportunity for all university constituents to make positive contributions free of verbal harassment and physical abuse. I am arguing that when institutions fail to ensure the visibility and safety of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, they (the institutions) are depriving themselves of a rich source of intellectual, cultural, and artistic talent.

Second, I suggest that educational programs about homophobia and heterosexism make connections between other forms of oppression such as racism and sexism (Smith, 1983). As a society we are beginning to understand the damage caused by racist and sexist language and the need to eliminate their use. Now is the time to make the same argument against homophobic and heterosexist language. Educators and administrators need to send the message that such language undermines the sense of self and deters the rights of individuals to freely participate in society. And, we need to communicate that when one lives in a world fearing verbal and physical abuse this fear negatively impacts intellectual growth and development. This is the notion that diversity is not solely about tolerance, but is also about providing a climate where all individuals are allowed to flourish - free of harassment - regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Third, institutions should provide support services to meet the special needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, just as they provide these services to meet the special needs of athletes, women, students of color, Greeks, and international students (Obear, 1991). I have established that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people experience a campus climate unlike that of their heterosexual peers and that such an environment can have a strong negative affect upon their intellectual and emotional development. Given this

condition it seems fitting that services should be offered to help students, staff and faculty address their specific needs.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have identified the dominant themes that individuals at Normal State University rely upon to justify opposition and hostility toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and I have linked these themes to homophobia and heterosexism. In doing so, I have pointed out the various comments used to support cultural norms and values - defining lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as immoral and deviant, as well as dismissing sexual orientation as a private matter, unworthy of university attention.

University officials need to be aware that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are denied an assortment of educational, economic, and social opportunities because cultural norms define heterosexuality as a preferred sexual orientation. If they are aware of this and if institutions of higher education are devoted to providing a positive educational and work climate for all individuals, educators and administrators need to take steps to create an environment of visibility and safety for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. I argue that university administrators and educators should take responsibility for educating their communities about homophobia and heterosexism, the manifestations of these concepts, and the harm they create to the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

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